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Wednesday, 20 September 2006, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Ms. Al-Khalifa ..... (Bahrain)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Address by Mr. Hâmid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Mr. Hâmid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Hâmid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and to invite him to address the General Assembly.

President Karzai: Every year our gathering under this roof does homage to the foresight of our predecessors, who, by founding the United Nations, envisioned the unity of nations. Today, this Assembly embodies that vision: the vision of our interdependence as members of a single community of nations. This vision has a strong resonance in Afghanistan, where both our past troubles and our recent accomplishments are, in large part, related to the outside world.

When I last addressed the Assembly in 2004 I spoke about the tremendous progress that Afghanistan had achieved since 2001. Today that story of success continues. Over the past two years we have taken further significant steps forward, attaining all the milestones in Afghanistan's post-war transition. Millions of Afghans have participated in two general elections, one for the president and another for the parliament. With the inauguration of our National Assembly last year all three independent branches of a democratic state were completed. We have continued to build schools and clinics and create employment opportunities for our people. Our trade with the region and beyond is growing very rapidly. Industrial activity is gradually taking root. As a result, Afghanistan's income per capita has doubled since 2002.

At the London Conference earlier this year our Government presented Afghanistan's National Development Strategy for the next five years, which the international community endorsed. Afghanistan and its international partners also entered into a compact, the Afghanistan Compact, which provides the framework for continued international cooperation in Afghanistan. Under the compact we Afghans committed to continue to work towards a stable and prosperous Afghanistan, with good governance and human rights protection for all under the rule of law. In return, the international community pledged continued and long-term political, military and financial assistance.

Regrettably, it is not all positive news that I have to share today. Over the past year our efforts to build Afghanistan into a stable, prosperous and democratic polity have also encountered setbacks. We have seen terrorism rebounding as terrorists have infiltrated our borders to step up their murderous campaign against our people. Terrorism sees in the prosperity of the

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Afghan people its ultimate defeat. That is why our schools and clinics get burned down, and our *ulema*, our teachers and our doctors get killed. That is why today 200,000 of our students who went to school a year ago are no longer able to do so.

It is also sobering to know that polio, the children's disease, increased from only four cases in 2005 to 27 this year. All those cases occurred in some areas of southern Afghanistan where terrorists are preventing children's access to vaccination and health care.

Terrorists are prepared to cross any boundary and commit horrific acts of violence to try to derail Afghanistan from its path to success. They want the international community to fail in its collective endeavour to help Afghanistan to rebuild. That is why they decapitate elderly women, blow up mosques full of worshippers and kill schoolchildren in indiscriminate bombings of civilian areas. That is why they are killing international soldiers and civilians who have come to Afghanistan to help the Afghan people, such as the four Canadian soldiers who were killed four days ago while distributing notebooks and candies to children in a village in Kandahar, or the Turkish engineer who was building roads in Helmand. Clearly, unless we confront them more decisively, terrorists will continue to take lives and inflict greater damage.

To be sure, terrorism does not emanate from within Afghanistan; Afghanistan is its worst victim. Military action in Afghanistan alone, therefore, will not deliver our shared goal of eliminating terrorism. We must look beyond Afghanistan to the sources of terrorism. We must destroy terrorist sanctuaries beyond Afghanistan, dismantle the elaborate networks in the region that recruit, indoctrinate, train, finance, arm and deploy terrorists. We must ensure that political currents and entities in the region are not allowed to use extremism as an instrument of policy.

Fighting terrorism effectively is also tied to our fight against narcotics. The menace of narcotics feeds terrorism and threatens the foundation of legitimate economic development in Afghanistan and also, of course, in the region.

A combination of factors — mainly the lack of a security environment conducive to our counter-narcotics efforts, the absence of a comprehensive alternative livelihoods programme and clandestine credit flows to poppy farmers — is behind the narcotics trade. Afghanistan is committed to fighting narcotics, alongside terrorism, with strength and determination and through a combination of law enforcement and economic measures. We expect that the international community will continue to support us in this fight by enabling us to provide meaningful alternative livelihoods to our farmers.

In the context of the United Nations role in enhancing global security we endorse the recommendations of the Secretary-General for a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy and welcome the recent adoption of the strategy by the General Assembly.

We also express our support for the proposal to convene a high-level conference on international terrorism with a view to concluding the draft comprehensive convention on international terrorism at the earliest possible opportunity.

Afghanistan also attaches great importance to the various initiatives undertaken to promote understanding and cooperation among civilizations. Afghanistan stands ready to contribute to further enriching these initiatives with our knowledge and experience of international cooperation and interdependence.

Meanwhile, we remain deeply concerned at the increased incidence of Islamophobia in the West. This trend does not bode well for the cause of building understanding and cooperation across civilizations. As a Muslim nation, Afghanistan is committed not only to safeguarding the interest of our Holy Faith but also to building bridges of understanding and friendship among followers of all faiths.

The situation in the Middle East, including the question of Palestine, remains a source of great concern to us in Afghanistan. Afghanistan strongly supports the full realization of the rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to sovereignty and an independent State of Palestine living side by side in peace and coexistence with the State of Israel. Afghanistan also shares the pain of the people of Lebanon as they suffer a terrible relapse into destruction caused by war. We hope that the international community will step in with concern and generosity to address Lebanon's needs so that it may recover.

To conclude, I thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his exemplary leadership in serving the cause of global security and prosperity. I thank him especially for his interest in and commitment to Afghanistan and for his contribution to making our world a more secure place.

I also thank the members of the international community for their steadfast and generous support for Afghanistan over the past five years. I convey the gratitude of the Afghan people for the sacrifices that the men and women in uniform from about 40 countries throughout the world have made in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan. We will honour those sacrifices by remaining true to our vision of building a secure, democratic and prosperous Afghanistan that will contribute to the progress of our region and to the security of the world at large.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I thank the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for his statement.

Mr. Hâmid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Martín Torrijos, President of the Republic of Panama

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Panama.

Mr. Martín Torrijos, President of the Republic of Panama, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Martín Torrijos, President of the Republic of Panama, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Torrijos *(spoke in Spanish)*: I should like to say how pleased the Government of Panama is at your election, Madam, to preside over the sixty-first session of the General Assembly. Your illustrious professional record and your extraordinary action in defence of women's rights lead us to believe that you will guide us in an exemplary manner. I also congratulate the Secretary-General on his encouraging words yesterday. The ovation that ensued bears witness to the Assembly's gratitude for his efforts over 10 years of heading the Secretariat.

Over the past few years we have dedicated considerable effort and time to the task of reforming the United Nations. We are doing this for one simple reason: we want it to work better. That aspiration is based on a profound conviction that the Organization is indispensable for humanity. Those who criticize the Organization must be honest when they wonder what the world would be like without the United Nations and its specialized agencies. Those who govern are examined on a daily basis by their peoples and sometimes they are criticized very severely, but nobody suggests that there should not be a government. We want governments to be better because they are necessary, just as we want the United Nations to be better because it is equally necessary. We do not want to imagine a world without a United Nations. That is why at the Summit in September last year, as the culmination of long debate and tremendous collective effort, we agreed on a series of reforms for the United Nations machinery.

What is at stake today is not just the fate of a single initiative, but, rather, the effectiveness of the United Nations in complying with the purposes and principles of the Charter. The General Assembly has acted with diligence, and we are proud in particular of the decision to create a Human Rights Council, whose establishment should strengthen respect for human rights and spread their promotion globally. Panama, born closely linked to international affairs, continues to be committed to strengthening human rights throughout the world. It is in this field that we see the greatest paradox: where the United Nations has made the most progress is where there remains the most progress still to be made. Before its inception human rights violations were almost ignored. Today the denunciations made at the United Nations have a tremendous deterrent power, so those violations do not continue to be perpetrated. At the same time, it is true that there have been horrendous violations during the life of the United Nations, but no one can deny that the reality and consequences are very different from the situation that prevailed only a few decades ago.

The United Nations and its specialized agencies have the important task of coordinating efforts to protect the millions of human beings living in poverty. Poverty is the daily denial of man's fundamental rights. While genocide causes indignation and is emphatically rejected by the international community, there should be the same indignation over poverty, as it afflicts a

large part of the world's population. Governments have a moral obligation to help people and communities living below the poverty line. Economic growth rates are deceptive, and almost offensive, if there is no direct relief for those who have less and who, without assistance, have no chance of breaking out of the vicious circle of poverty.

Within the reforms to the Organization now being debated, we should, in order more effectively to address poverty in the world, give greater weight and authority to the General Assembly to adopt measures of universal scope, not resolutions, repeated year after year, with no binding power.

Similarly, I should like to address the need to expand the Security Council so that it truly represents today's world and not the world as it was 60 years ago. Not to reform the Security Council would be detrimental to its purposes. A Council that is not representative cannot be as legitimate or effective. However, although there is consensus about the need to reform, how to reform has provoked more disunity than agreement. From Panama's perspective, geographical representation is an important factor to be considered, but it cannot be the only one. A member of the Security Council does not sit on the Council to represent itself or the geographic region to which it belongs; it represents all Member States, which have entrusted it with this responsibility because it has shown the commitment and capacity to further the effort to maintain international peace and security.

It is time now to look at this topic with different eyes. The facts that are developing continuously in the Middle East, and the fact that terrorist attacks continue to occur throughout the world, show that it is crucial to strengthen the Security Council as soon as possible through a process of reform that includes a moderate expansion of the membership while the Council remains legitimate in the eyes of the rest of the international community. Strengthening the organs of the United Nations, and more particularly the Security Council, will make it possible for events such as those in Lebanon to be met with a prompt and effective response. If the Organization had had the required instruments to act robustly with legitimacy, we could have put an early end to the confrontations; in fact, they could have been avoided entirely if we had had an adequate preventive force. The rapid escalation of the conflict has highlighted the imperative need to resolve the Middle East crisis so that Jews, Muslims and Christians can coexist in peace, as they do in Panama and many other parts of the world.

There are tested ways to promote confidence among parties, to reconcile positions and to achieve consensus. The use of arms can help some people to gain some short-term objectives but the atmosphere is poisoned and there cannot be peaceful coexistence among neighbours, families and peoples that geography has placed so close to one another. It is obvious from every perspective that a solution to the conflict requires the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of Israel from the occupied territories, establishment of the Palestine State and recognition of Israel's right to exist as a State. All the countries in the region must have sufficient guarantees that conflicts will not be resolved through force and that no territory can be used to attack a neighbour. Peace in the Middle East has to be built by each and every State with the resolute support of the international community.

Our vision is the same for other regions of the world where a high degree of political tension still prevails and endangers the peace. Peaceful solutions cannot be postponed, for there is always the risk of violent confrontations of unsuspected dimensions that we will all deplore.

I should like to draw attention to a significant event that will take place in my country in the next few weeks and will have an impact on world trade. On 22 October there will be a referendum to decide whether the Panama Canal should be expanded. The historic and emotional dimension of the canal for the Panamanian people means that its expansion is the only decision of the legislature and the Executive that needs a referendum for confirmation. The Panama Canal links the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. It is therefore the best route for the transport of goods between different continents, between two countries in the American continent, and even between two coasts in a single country. Five per cent of world maritime trade passes through the Panama Canal. The percentage varies from one country to another: 3.5 per cent of an economy the size of China's; 16 per cent of the United States foreign trade; and 35 per cent of Chile's trade. The fact is that the future of the Panama Canal affects the international community as a whole.

Only seven years ago the canal was run by the United States. After a long and complex negotiation that included a special meeting of the Security Council

in Panama — one of only two times that that body has met outside New York Headquarters — it reverted to Panama on the last day of the twentieth century. Since then Panama has administered the canal with efficiency and safety, and it is now about to decide whether to take the tremendous step of expanding the canal to enhance its capacity and allow larger ships to use it.

The United Nations has always been involved in Panama's fate, the fate of the canal. It was on the agenda when it was a continuing source of conflict between Panama and the United States. It supported the Universal Congress on the canal in 1997 and finally it welcomed the canal's orderly transfer to Panamanian jurisdiction. That is why Panama once again wishes to draw the General Assembly's attention to the canal and to reiterate its gratitude to the Non-Aligned Movement, because last week the Heads of State and Government adopted a declaration recognizing the efficient administration of the Panama Canal and expressing their support for the initiative to expand its present capacity. The canal is the most important resource for my country's development and is a valuable strategic avenue at the service of trade and communications for the entire world.

In my country there is full awareness that our geographic position is our major asset, but that its exploitation involves responsibilities towards the international community. That is why, while we welcome international recognition of the manner in which we have been administering the canal, we also wish to tell the world body that the Panama Canal will continue to be managed so as to be efficient, neutral and safe, for the benefit of all ships in the world, flying every flag.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Panama for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Martín Torrijos, President of the Republic of Panama, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mrs. Michelle Bachelet Jeria, President of the Republic of Chile

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Chile.

Mrs. Michelle Bachelet Jeria, President of the Republic of Chile, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations Her Excellency Mrs. Michelle Bachelet Jeria, President of the Republic of Chile, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

President Bachelet Jeria (*spoke in Spanish*): I come before the General Assembly as the first woman to be elected President of Chile, a country that has learned from its history.

We Chileans are living through difficult times; the Assembly knows this. The learning curve was difficult but productive. From pain hope was born. Major dissent gave way to major consensus. I come from a country where today the rule of law prevails, where the rights of persons are respected and promoted. It is a democracy that is experiencing economic growth, which in the past 16 years has helped millions of Chileans out of poverty. Chile stands with its region and looks at the world. My presence here today is a symbol of that Chile, a Chile that is unafraid to look back at the past and is united in building its own future. We can say with pride that today Chile is more free and more fair. As a society we have granted every citizen the basic dignity and respect that he or she deserves.

The world looks different from the far distant south, and that is the viewpoint my country wishes to bring here, a viewpoint that is optimistic about the opportunities of globalization but cautious about its risks. We can and must steer the course of the planet. Humans cannot and must not avoid being the instruments of their own advancement.

We wish to reaffirm our commitment to international law and institutions. Only through them shall we be able to build the fairer and more integrated world of which we dream, where large and small coexist in peace and harmony. The United Nations is a special instrument in this construction. A year ago we agreed on a programme for the reform of the Organization based on development, security and human rights. This has been called the millennium of hope. Let us make that hope a reality and do so from here, from this forum.

Development is a responsibility shared by all members of the international community, including the developed countries. Its attainment requires imagination and the political will to consolidate the world alliance endorsed by the Millennium Declaration. All this presupposes a more open, transparent and fair commercial and financial system. To our developed friends I say "Opening your markets to products from the south is a requirement of justice." That will represent a huge step forward towards the elimination of poverty. Let us therefore redouble our efforts to bring the Doha Round to a successful conclusion and make progress in integration processes at the regional level.

As an early supporter of the idea of President Lula of Brazil, Chile joined other countries in the initiative Action against Hunger and Poverty. We have introduced a solidarity tax of $2 on international airline tickets, and the funds produced will finance the International Drug Purchase Facility (UNITAID) project, which will provide millions of quality drugs to people in developing countries suffering from malaria, tuberculosis and AIDS.

The most serious failure of the 2005 Summit was its silence on the multilateral disarmament agenda. Chile bases its multilateral foreign policy on the principle that collective security is indivisible. We all share a responsibility to preserve peace and international security. That is why Chile has joined in efforts to revitalize the disarmament agenda and move towards prohibition of the use of fissile material for military purposes.

The security of States is linked to the security of the human beings that make up those States, because it allows the exercise of freedom. Terrorism negates these freedoms and runs counter to the values that we share. Accordingly, we support the advance of United Nations reform in the area of counter-terrorism. Terrorism must be combated within democracy. Whenever we restrict constitutional guarantees and yield to the temptation to employ illegal methods to fight terrorism we are handing a victory to its proponents, because it is only then that they succeed in threatening the spirit of our democracy.

In a spirit of solidarity we are participating actively in the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Chile will continue to support the Haitian people, and I appeal from this rostrum to all donor countries to provide the economic and financial assistance already pledged.

The creation of the Peacebuilding Commission was undoubtedly one of the most outstanding achievements of the 2005 Summit. Chile has joined enthusiastically in the work of the Commission and will endeavour to ensure that its results live up to the hopes placed in it by nations.

My country deplores the serious crisis affecting the Middle East and strongly condemns any armed action targeting innocent civilians. Self-defence may be exercised only within the framework of proportionality and containment outlined in international humanitarian law. The delay in the Security Council's call for a ceasefire in Lebanon was also inconsistent with the letter and spirit of the Charter. The credibility of the Organization requires that all stakeholders do their duty without discrimination and without subordinating collective security to their individual interests.

Chile supports the deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) with its expanded mandate, and will continue to respond to the appeal to meet urgent humanitarian needs in Lebanon and Palestine. We urge full implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), which calls on the international community to cooperate in a full cessation of hostilities in the Middle East, the restoration of Lebanon's sovereignty over its territory and the guaranteeing of Israel's security.

The promotion and defence of human rights and democracy is the cornerstone of Chile's foreign policy. As I said at the outset, we have learned a great deal from our own history. Exactly 30 years ago the General Assembly received terrible news: Orlando Letelier, the former Foreign Minister and Defence Minister of President Allende, had been brutally murdered on the street in Washington D.C. Representatives were horrified by that crime and today I remember with emotion how we felt. I mention that to illustrate how we have learned the lessons of the past. Nothing justifies the violation of human rights. Chile rejects impunity.

I assure all members of our commitment and enthusiasm to participate in initiatives designed to promote human rights and democracy. We therefore welcome the launching of the United Nations Democracy Fund and the creation of the Human Rights

Council. We very much value the Council's adoption of the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance.

The promotion of human rights does not contradict the principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of States. Chile has been, and will remain, in the front line in the defence of human rights.

The General Assembly must continue United Nations reform. It must revitalize itself, reform and expand the Security Council, reform the Economic and Social Council and modernize the management of the Secretariat and the administrative procedures of the Organization.

Allow me to reaffirm our hope in the United Nations. As a woman, a doctor and the political leader of a developing country, today I ask that we choose life, affirm justice, promote social justice and make this noble Organization the common and continuing response to our peoples' dreams of peace, development and dignity.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Chile for the statement she has just made.

Mrs. Michelle Bachelet Jeria, President of the Republic of Chile, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Rajapaksa: On behalf of the Government and people of Sri Lanka I congratulate you, Madam President, on your assumption of the high office of the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. I am happy to note that a lady from a sister Asian country will guide us through the current session. As Sri Lanka was the first country in the modern world to elect a woman as Head of Government — Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike — your assumption of this high office is of special significance to us. To Mr. Jan Eliasson I convey our gratitude for the leadership he provided during the work of the sixtieth session.

In 1970, when I was first elected to the Parliament of Sri Lanka, a paragraph in the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations gave substance and direction to my future political life. It was "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small". Having been a human rights campaigner at the grassroots level throughout my political life, I found it natural that my new Government should be committed to carrying the message of democracy to all corners of our multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious country. "Democracy, equity and prosperity" is our clarion call.

In addition, my country has been influenced by the core Buddhist values of non-violence, loving kindness, compassion, equanimity and mindfulness. With this sense of direction, our Government has committed itself "Towards a new Sri Lanka", guided by a vision of peace, where every Sri Lankan citizen may live with dignity and self-respect, in freedom and without fear, free of want, and where every child may enjoy childhood and grow up with hope and expectation.

However, Sri Lanka's dream is threatened by a terrible affliction that impedes development, undermines democracy and challenges fundamental freedoms. I refer to the bane of terrorism which confronts my country and many other countries of the world. I reaffirm my Government's firm commitment to supporting all global efforts to combat terrorism whenever and wherever it raises its ugly head. Terrorism has become closely intertwined with organized crime. It is now directly linked with people smuggling, the trade in illicit drugs, the illegal trade in small arms and money-laundering. Terrorism is a major impediment to development and poses a terrible challenge to civilized society. We support all measures undertaken in the United Nations to meet this challenge. We have ratified all United Nations conventions in this regard.

In our capacity as Chair of the ad hoc committee on measures to eliminate international terrorism we shall spare no effort to realize the international legal framework to facilitate our common struggle against terrorism. It is our fervent hope that the comprehensive convention on international terrorism will soon become a reality.

The illicit trade in and trafficking of small arms and light weapons has contributed to the escalation of many local conflicts because of the easy availability of arms for non-State actors. Sri Lanka is concerned that, despite the commitment of the international community to wipe out this menace, the impact at ground level throughout the world is limited. We hope that the United Nations Plan of Action on this matter will be fully implemented and its scope further expanded in the future.

With regard to terrorism, I speak from personal experience in my own country. Exploiting minority concerns, which we are addressing politically, a ruthless terrorist outfit in Sri Lanka, the LTTE, has been terrorizing our people for over two decades. In an age when the world seeks dialogue and peace, the LTTE devotes its full force to violence, suicide bombings, massacre of civilians, indiscriminate armed assaults and the conscription of young children for war. Assurances given to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict on the conscription of children for armed combat have been blatantly violated.

At the presidential election in November last year people in certain parts of Sri Lanka were cruelly deprived of their freedom to vote. Furthermore, in an act of ethnic cleansing more than 60,000 Muslims were forcibly expelled from their homes in the north.

Our Government believes that some of the concerns of minorities in my country have deep roots. In this connection I recall the following words in the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO): "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed".

Soon after my election, despite the violence unleashed by the terrorists, I expressed the conviction that we needed to address the causes of the conflict from a fresh perspective and with a new approach to develop a sustainable solution. We examined this issue with an open mind, and looked at every option with a view to evolving a national consensus to achieve an honourable peace in an undivided country. A consultative process is currently under way to prepare constitutional proposals to address the concerns of the minorities. I have invited the LTTE to participate in the process of seeking a solution to the conflict through dialogue.

As one of the oldest democracies in Asia, we are firmly convinced that the restoration of democracy, the creation of space for dissent, and the promotion of human rights in the conflict-affected areas are essential elements of a successful and sustainable process of peace. I hope that the international community will continue to extend to us its fullest support towards the transformation of the LTTE into a democratic civilian organization.

Our Government firmly believes that terrorism cannot be eliminated through military means alone. We remain fully committed to talking with the LTTE, either directly or through a facilitator. It is our hope that the LTTE will transform itself from a terrorist outfit into one that is committed to dialogue and democracy. Our Government stands ready to respond to any display of good will and a move towards a non-violent approach.

We continue to take unilateral humanitarian measures, which extend even to terrorist cadres. As a responsible Government we will continue to provide unhindered access to conflict-affected areas to the International Committee of the Red Cross, United Nations agencies and other recognized humanitarian agencies.

More than 53,000 Muslims were evicted from their homes by the terrorists following the recent violence. They are the innocent victims of the LTTE's ruthless policies. Following Government counter-measures, almost all have now returned to their homes. The Government has assumed responsibility to provide medical supplies, food and other essential items to the internally displaced persons living in the affected areas.

I am pleased to state that, despite the conflict in our country, the economy of Sri Lanka continues to grow at a commendable rate. In the first quarter of this year we recorded growth of 8.1 per cent — the highest in 28 years. With our determination to further enhance growth with equity, we have adopted an economic

strategy that will provide opportunities for all citizens, while giving adequate space to the private sector as the engine of growth.

We continue to maintain the highest rating in South Asia on the Human Development Index. We have already achieved some of the Millennium Development Goal targets in primary school enrolment, gender equality and maternal and infant mortality rates. We hope that the increased economic opportunities in the country will further encourage the LTTE to opt for a negotiated peace.

We follow a pro-poor development strategy, with a focus on regionally balanced growth. Our objective is to achieve overall development while raising the income levels of the poor through the empowerment of communities living at the grass-roots level. In this connection, Sri Lanka hopes that debt forgiveness will continue to be expanded to encourage the development of developing countries. It is only right that those who reach the heights of development should pause to lend a helping hand to those who have fallen behind due to circumstances.

I wish to acknowledge the role of President Clinton, the United Nations Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery, and the Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for their assistance with tsunami-related support. I also acknowledge the support given by many other countries. I am pleased to state that, despite being a developing country, we are now well on the way to recovery from this massive disaster, in many instances as a result of the efforts of our own people. We urge our development partners to stay involved with us in this long-term effort.

We in Sri Lanka see the United Nations as indispensable in creating a just and secure world order. We, the 192 Members of the United Nations, must continue to have faith in our collective capacity to reform the United Nations so that it is made more effective and more relevant to the needs of its Members in facing the challenges of the twenty-first century.

We are pleased with several important measures that have been adopted since the sixtieth session. Given my personal commitment to the promotion of human rights at both the local and international level, the establishment of the Human Rights Council, with enhanced status and capacity to promote and protect human rights worldwide, is a cause for delight. I am happy that Sri Lanka was elected to the Council last May. In honouring a pledge made during the presidential election last year, we have already started work on crafting a human rights charter in Sri Lanka. Consistent with our goal of safeguarding human rights, my Government will establish an international panel to observe investigations into certain alleged human rights violations that my Government has already condemned.

The establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission is another important landmark achievement of the United Nations this year. We are pleased that Sri Lanka has been elected to its organizing Committee as a founder member of that important body. The needs and concerns of those affected, the specific theatres of conflict, and the realities on the ground of each specific situation must necessarily be taken into account in the Commission's work.

We are also encouraged by the general agreement that the Security Council must be strengthened, as it does not reflect current geopolitical realities. We therefore look forward to the continuation of work towards Security Council reform, towards making its composition more representative and its decision-making more democratic. It is essential that the Security Council reflect the current geopolitical realities in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

For long years now, on the basis of our commitment to human rights and dignity, we have had a lasting interest in seeing the emergence of peace in the Middle East. Recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people is of concern to me and to my country. Many Sri Lankans have in recent years made the Middle East their temporary home. We are pained by the recent escalation of violence in that region and the devastation in Lebanon. It is our sincere hope that Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) will pave the way for peace and security for Lebanon and the region.

The Preamble to the Charter requires that we "unite our strength to maintain international peace and security". Let us all, Members of the United Nations, focus sharply on this commitment. Let us dedicate ourselves to its realization and let us mobilize our collective energies towards the achievement of peace and security worldwide.

Let us make peace the goal of the present decade. Let us all unite for peace. May all living beings be free

of suffering, be healthy and be prosperous. May the blessings of the Noble Triple Gem be with you all.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Mahinda Rajapaksa, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Hugo Chávez Frías, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Mr. Hugo Chávez Frías, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Hugo Chávez Frías, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Chávez Frías (*spoke in Spanish*): First I very respectfully invite all those who have not done so to read the book that I am holding, one of the most recent by Noam Chomsky, who is among the most prestigious American and world intellectuals. The book, "Hegemony or Survival: America's Quest for Global Dominance", is an excellent work to help us understand what happened in the world of the twentieth century and what is happening now, which is the greatest threat looming over our planet: the hegemonistic claims of American imperialism, which threaten the very survival of the human species. We continue to warn about this danger and to appeal to the people of the United States and the world to halt this threat, which is like the sword of Damocles hanging over our heads.

I had considered reading a chapter from the book, but to save time I shall confine myself to a recommendation. The book is very good, an easy read. I am sure, Madam President, that you are familiar with it. It is published in English, German, Russian and Arabic. The first people who should read it are our brothers and sisters in the United States, because the threat is in their own house. The Devil is there; the Devil himself is in the house.

The Devil came here yesterday, right here. It still smells of sulphur today. Yesterday on this rostrum the President of the United States, whom I refer to as the Devil, talked as if he owned the world. It would be appropriate to have a psychiatrist analyse yesterday's address by the President of the United States. As the spokesman of imperialism he came to share his prescriptions for preserving the current pattern of domination, exploitation and pillage of the peoples of the world. It was like an Alfred Hitchcock movie. I would even propose a title: "The Devil's Recipe".

As Chomsky says here clearly and in depth, American imperialism is doing all it can to consolidate its hegemonistic system of domination. We cannot allow it to do that. We cannot allow the establishment and consolidation of world dictatorship. The address of the world tyrant, cynical and full of hypocrisy, shows the imperialists' intention to control everything. They say that they want to impose a democratic model, but it is the democratic model of their own conception: the false democracy of elites, and furthermore an original democratic model imposed by bombs, bombardments and invasions. What a strange democracy! It would be necessary to revise the ideas of Aristotle and the other Greek pioneers of democracy in the face of this model, imposed by marines, invasions, aggression and bombs.

The President of the United States told us yesterday in this Hall, "everywhere you turn you hear extremists who tell you that you can escape your misery and retain your dignity through violence and terror and martyrdom." (*see A/61/PV.10*). Wherever he looks he sees extremists, and when he looks at your colour, my brother, he thinks "You are an extremist". Mr. Evo Morales Aima, the worthy President of Bolivia, looks like an extremist to him. The imperialists see extremists everywhere.

No, it is not that we are extremists. What is happening is that the world is waking up and people everywhere are rising up. I tell the world dictator "I have a feeling that the rest of your days will be a living nightmare, because everywhere you will see us rising up against American imperialism, demanding freedom, equality of peoples and respect for the sovereignty of nations." Yes, we may be described as extremists, but we are rising against the empire, against the model of domination.

The President also said, "I would like to speak directly to the people across the ... Middle East: my country desires peace." That is true. If we walk through the streets of the Bronx, New York, Washington, San Diego, California, San Antonio and San Francisco — anywhere in the United States — and speak to individual citizens, we shall find that the country does want peace. The difference is that the Government of the United States does not. It wants to impose its system of exploitation and pillage and its hegemony through war. If it wants peace, what is happening in Iraq? What happened in Lebanon and Palestine? What has happened over the past hundred years in Latin America and in world? Now there are new threats against Venezuela and Iran.

The President spoke to the people of Lebanon, saying "Many of you have seen your homes and communities caught in crossfire." What cynicism! What a capacity to lie shamelessly! Was it crossfire when bombs were dropped on Beirut with millimetric precision? He was thinking of a Western, where men shoot from the hip and somebody gets caught in the crossfire. This was imperialist fire, fascist fire, the fire of an assassin, the genocidal firing of the empire and Israel on the innocent people of Palestine and Lebanon. That is the truth.

Now it is said that we are suffering because we see homes destroyed. Early this morning I was looking at some statements in preparing my remarks, and I have brought with me a document in which I note that the President of the United States came to talk to the peoples. He said "To the people of Afghanistan", "To the people of Lebanon", "To the people of Iran". He addressed them all directly. One wonders what those peoples would tell him if they were given the opportunity. What would they have to say? I know what is in the soul of the peoples of the south, the oppressed peoples. They would say "Yankee imperialist, go home!" That would be the cry of the peoples of the world if they could speak with one voice to the American imperialists.

That is why last year when I came to this Hall, as I have been doing for the past eight years, I said something that has now been fully confirmed. Hardly anybody here can defend the United Nations system. Let us be honest and accept that the system born after the Second World War has collapsed. It is worthless. It is true that it serves to bring us together once a year to meet, make statements, prepare long documents, reflect and listen to good speeches like those yesterday by President Evo and President Lula and the ones we have just heard from the President of Sri Lanka and the President of Chile. But the Assembly has been turned into a merely deliberative organ, with no power to make any impact on the terrible situation in the world.

That is why Venezuela once again proposes here today, 20 September, that we re-establish the United Nations. Last year we made four modest proposals that we felt were crucially important for discussion by heads of State and Government, ambassadors and representatives.

The first — President Lula said this yesterday — is the expansion of both the permanent and non-permanent membership of the Security Council, with developed and under-developed countries of the third world as new permanent members. That is the first step.

Secondly, there must be effective methods to address and resolve world conflicts, with transparent debate and decision-making.

Thirdly, it is essential that, as everyone demands, there be an immediate end to the anti-democratic mechanism of the veto that is exercised when decisions are made in the Security Council. Let me give a recent example. The immoral veto of the United States, blocking a resolution, allowed the Israeli forces to destroy Lebanon with impunity before our very eyes.

Fourthly, as we have always said, the role and powers of the Secretary-General must be strengthened. Yesterday the Secretary-General practically gave us his farewell speech. He recognized that in the past 10 years serious world problems such as hunger, poverty, violence and human rights violations had worsened and become more complicated. That is a terrible consequence of the collapse of the United Nations system and American hegemonistic pretensions.

A few years ago Venezuela decided to wage this battle within the United Nations, recognizing the United Nations, as Members, and lending it our voice and our thinking. Our voice is an independent one representing dignity, the search for truth and the reformulation of the international system, with denunciation of persecution and of the aggression of hegemonistic forces against peoples of the planet.

That is how Venezuela, the homeland of Bolivar, came to put itself forward for a non-permanent seat on

the Security Council. The United States Government launched open, immoral aggression throughout the world to try to prevent Venezuela being freely elected to a seat on the Security Council. The empire is afraid of the truth, of independent voices. It calls us extremists, but it is the extremist.

I should like to thank all those countries that have announced their support for Venezuela even though the ballot is secret and there is no need to make an announcement. I believe that the open attack by the United States empire has increased the support of many countries, and that support strengthens the morale of Venezuela, our people and Government. Our brothers in the Southern Cone Common Market (MERCOSUR), for example, have expressed their support as a bloc. With Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay, as well as many other Latin American countries, such as Bolivia, Venezuela is now a full member of MERCOSUR. The Caribbean Community has expressed its support for Venezuela, as has the Arab League. I am immensely grateful to our Arab and Caribbean brothers. The African Union, almost all of Africa, has expressed support for Venezuela, as have countries such as Russia, China and many others.

On behalf of Venezuela and its people, and of the truth, I thank them all most warmly. With a seat on the Security Council, Venezuela will make not only its voice but that of the third world and all peoples heard throughout the world. We will defend dignity and truth.

Over and above all this, there are reasons to be optimistic — a poet would say "hopelessly optimistic". Beyond the threats, the bombs, the wars, aggression, preventive war and the destruction of entire peoples, we can see that a new era is dawning. As Silvio Rodriguez sings, "the era is giving birth to a heart". New trends are developing, alternative ways of thinking, alternative movements. Young people think differently. As has been shown in scarcely a decade, the idea of the end of history has been shown to be totally false, as has that of the Pax Americana and the establishment of the capitalist neo-liberal model, which creates poverty and is rejected.

Now we must define the future of the world. The dawn is breaking all over: Latin America, Africa, Europe and Oceania. I want to emphasize that optimistic vision, so that we may strengthen our will and our readiness to fight to save the world and build a new and better world.

Venezuela joins that struggle, and that is why we are threatened. The United States has already planned, financed and set in motion a coup in Venezuela, and it continues to support coup attempts and terrorism there. President Michelle Bachelet Jeria reminded us a short time ago of the horrendous assassination of the former Chilean Foreign Minister, Orlando Letelier. I would simply add that those who perpetrated that crime, in which an American citizen also died, are free. And they are Americans themselves, CIA terrorists.

We should also recall that in a few days there will be another anniversary: 30 years will have passed since another horrendous terrorist act, the destruction of an airliner of Cubana de Aviación in which 73 innocent people died. Where is the biggest terrorist of this continent, who masterminded the blowing up of the plane? He spent a few years in prison in Venezuela, but thanks to the CIA and Venezuelan Government officials at the time he was able to escape. Now he lives in the United States, protected by the Government. He confessed and was convicted of his crime, but the United States Government has double standards and protects terrorism when it wants to. I say this to make the point that Venezuela is fully committed to combating terrorism and violence, and joins those peoples that are fighting for peace and a world of equals.

I have just spoken of the Cuban airliner. Luis Posada Carriles is the name of the terrorist concerned. He is protected here, as are very corrupt people who have fled Venezuela. A group of terrorists bombed various embassies and assassinated people. During the attempted coup they kidnapped me and were going to shoot me. But God intervened, as did a group of loyal soldiers and the people, who took to the streets. So by a miracle I am here today. The leaders of that attempted coup and those terrorist acts are living in this country today, protected by the United States Government. I accuse the American Government of protecting terrorists and of holding a completely cynical discourse.

I mentioned Cuba. I was very recently in Havana for a few days, and I left it feeling happy because the birth of a new era could be seen. The Non-Aligned Movement summit adopted a historic final document. Do not worry; I shall not read it out. It contains a set of resolutions adopted after open and transparent debate. More than 50 heads of State attended, and Havana was the capital of the south for a week.

We have now relaunched the Non-Aligned Movement. If there is anything I could ask of all those here, my partners and brothers and sisters, it is that they lend their good will to strengthen the Non-Aligned Movement, which is important for the birth of the new era and the prevention of hegemony and imperialism. The Assembly will know that we elected President Fidel Castro Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement for the next three years, and we can trust him to lead us very efficiently. Those who hoped that Fidel would die were disappointed, and they will continue to be disappointed, because he is back in his olive-green fatigues and is now not only President of Cuba but Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement. A very strong movement has been born: that of the South. We are men and women of the South.

With these documents, ideas, criticisms and reflections, I am now closing my file and taking the book with me. Do not forget that I recommend it very warmly and very humbly to all those present. I have tried to put forward ideas to save our planet, to save it from the imperialist threat. I hope that in this century, in the not too distant future, we shall see our children and grandchildren living better, in a world of peace based on the fundamental principles of the United Nations — a renewed and relocated United Nations. I believe that it must move to another country, to a city of the South. That is what we in Venezuela have proposed. The Assembly knows that my personal doctor and chief of security had to stay on a locked plane. Neither was allowed to come to the United Nations. This abuse we regard as a personal insult by the Devil. It smells of sulphur here, but God is with us, and I embrace you all. May God bless us all.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I thank the President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela for his statement.

Mr. Hugo Chávez Frías, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, President of the Republic of Maldives

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Republic of Maldives.

Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, President of the Republic of Maldives, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, President of the Republic of Maldives, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Gayoom (*spoke in Dhivehi; English text provided by the delegation*): The United Nations today is at a crossroads. It needs to become part of the twenty-first century, and it must do so with great urgency. It needs to gear itself to become an institution capable of taking on the serious challenges that confront the international community.

As we address these tasks, your election, Madam President, to preside over the sixty-first session of the General Assembly is a tribute to your wisdom and skill. It is also a compliment to your great country. I take this opportunity to congratulate you. At the same time, it gives me pleasure to express appreciation to Mr. Jan Eliasson, who presided so ably over the sixtieth session. Today, as the United Nations approaches the end of one era and the beginning of another, the Maldives expresses its profound appreciation to the outgoing Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan. He has led the Organization for a decade, with great devotion and skill.

Modernization should be a top priority for any organization that wants to remain relevant in a time of rapid change. It is particularly important for the United Nations because of the central role that it must continue to play in promoting cooperation for international peace and security, economic and social development, human rights and the rule of law. The Maldives believes that reform of the United Nations must be transparent, balanced, comprehensive and inclusive.

In addition to modernizing the Security Council, we must strengthen the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. These reforms must make the Organization more action-oriented and democratic. A reformed United Nations must be responsive to the entire membership, and be faithful to its founding principles. The Organization must be adapted to carry out its mandate in full. There can be no doubt that this can be achieved by gearing the United Nations to implement all its mandates, decisions and resolutions without fear or favour.

The question of equitable representation and an increase in the membership of the Security Council is a

crucial part of the reform process. The Maldives believes the membership of the Council must reflect the realities of the present day. In this regard, the Maldives reiterates its support for the proposal of the group of four on Security Council reform.

For the Maldives the next few years will be a crucial period in our national development. As a result of national efforts made with the support of the international community, the Maldives is today set to say goodbye to its least developed country status. The three-year smooth transition period will begin in January 2008. Graduation from the least developed country list will pose numerous challenges to us.

However, we look forward to that event as a positive development. We have already begun work with the donor community to identify ways in which the economic and social progress of the country will continue without disruption after graduation. In this regard, I note the successful launching of the Maldives Partnership Forum as an annual event. The first such forum was held in June this year. I wish to thank our donors for their continued commitment to support the development of the Maldives beyond graduation.

The graduation of the Maldives from least developed country status to that of a developing country coincides with an important political phase in the country's development. Over the past three years we have been engaged in a major political transformation. These reforms are based on the sustained social and economic progress that has qualified the Maldives for graduation. The political reform programme that we began in 2003 covers institutionalizing political pluralism and strengthening human rights protection, media freedom and judicial reform.

The achievements of the programme to date include the formation of four political parties last year, strengthening the fundamental rights of the people and enhancing the rule of law. Also a constitutional assembly is in session to modernize the constitution. Other projects are being implemented to overhaul the criminal justice system, set up a modern police service, strengthen media freedom and develop civil society.

We are also determined to meet the standards prescribed in international human rights treaties. Over the past two years we have acceded to the Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and its Optional Protocol. We have also acceded to the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. Just yesterday I deposited with the Secretary-General our instruments of accession to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its Optional Protocol and to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The Maldives was the country worst affected by the 2004 tsunami. Twenty-one months into the recovery programme, much has been achieved, but much remains to be done. I take this opportunity to thank the donor community and friendly countries for the support and assistance extended to our recovery programme. The biggest obstacle to the programme is the substantial funding shortfall in key aspects of recovery, in particular in the areas of repair and reconstruction of housing, transportation, water and sanitation, and environmental mitigation. The funding gap is estimated at $100 million. In addition, as a result of the impact of the tsunami and of high petroleum prices on public finances, there is a budget deficit of $100 million. At this critical juncture of our national progress I call upon our development partners, and the international community as a whole, to continue to assist the Maldives.

It is a matter of satisfaction to us that, despite the devastation caused by the tsunami and the short-term fiscal pressures, the Maldives has been able to meet some international development targets. In reducing poverty and in providing primary education the Maldives has already met the Millennium Development Goals. We are confident that we can attain the targets for health care and gender empowerment.

Instability in any part of the world has implications for the entire international community. One of the most intractable disputes of our time is the conflict in the Middle East, particularly the non-realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The recent hostilities in Lebanon and the sufferings of the Lebanese people have their roots in the Palestinian problem. The Palestinian issue must be resolved, in accordance with international law and the relevant resolutions of the Security Council.

The continued instability and violence in Afghanistan and Iraq is a matter of great concern to the Maldives. Years of instability and conflict have

ravaged the lives and society of the peoples of these countries.

The Maldives fully subscribes to the efforts made by the international community to combat terrorism. We are party to the major international conventions that have been formulated to defeat terrorism. Terrorism is an assault on the values of freedom and human solidarity. However, our efforts to combat the menace should avoid undermining the very values that we seek to protect. There is a resurgence of the vilification of Islam and Muslims. As the Maldives has been a 100 per cent Muslim nation for more than 850 years, we are dismayed by this trend. Islam has provided the basis for peace and social harmony in the Maldives. Islam preaches moderation, not extremism. Violence and killing are abhorrent to Islam. The Holy Koran states, "Take not life, which Allah hath made sacred, except by way of justice and law." (*The Holy Koran, VI:151*)

Needless to say, we are deeply pained and outraged by the negative imaging of Islam and the effort to associate fanaticism and violence with our peace-loving faith. The Holy Koran says, "Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion." (*ibid. XVI:90*)

Only love can conquer hatred. Knowledge alone can overcome prejudice. Tolerance can defeat fear. Stable peace requires inclusion. Effective and meaningful dialogue among civilizations and mutual respect among diverse peoples are necessary to address the challenges that we face today. Tolerance and respect for diversity are given a high value in Islam.

Civilization is under serious threat from the continued degradation of the environment and its resultant effects of global warming, climate change and sea-level rise. Small island States such as the Maldives and other low-lying regions of the world are in the front line of danger from rising seas. The extreme weather events of the past few years have been more frequent and destructive than ever before. They clearly demonstrate that the entire world is vulnerable to the devastation caused by climate change. The Kyoto Protocol has been a great disappointment. We call upon all countries to accelerate the adoption of urgent and realistic measures to stop climate change and sea-level rise.

If we are to address the vast array of challenges that humanity faces today we must effectively implement crucial blueprints and action programmes agreed through the multilateral process. We must breathe new life into Agenda 21. We must also adhere to the Monterrey Consensus. The Millennium Declaration must be followed up diligently. And, as Secretary-General Kofi Annan said earlier this month, the United Nations must move from a culture of reaction to one of prevention.

Today I am speaking in my vernacular language, Dhivehi. It represents the legacy of several millenniums of continuous settlement and the culture that it has produced in the Maldives. Is not the protection of such legacies the touchstone of success of this global family of nations? If the United Nations can make small and vulnerable countries feel safe, then who will be facing any danger at all?

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Republic of Maldives for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, President of the Republic of Maldives, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Agenda item 8 (*continued*)

General debate

Address by Mr. Romano Prodi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Italy

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Italy.

Mr. Romano Prodi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Italy, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Romano Prodi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Italy, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Prodi (Italy) (*spoke in Italian. English text provided by the delegation*): I wish to offer you my congratulations, Madam President, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. Your experience in international affairs is the best guarantee of the success of your term. At the same time I express to your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, our sincere thanks for his effective and

balanced leadership of the sixtieth session. My special appreciation goes also to Kofi Annan for having dedicated his life to the Organization, particularly in the past 10 years as Secretary-General, leading it through difficult challenges and laying the groundwork for its reform. Thank you, Kofi.

It was in this city on 11 September five years ago that the dramatic realization was forced upon us of just how dangerous the world has become. On that day we knew that the new millennium would hold unpredictable and complex threats extending beyond national borders; global threats against which notions of protection inside national borders are illusory; asymmetrical threats that are difficult to counter effectively with the instruments previously used to settle conflicts.

Terrorism and weapons of mass destruction have changed traditional society and its values. They have rendered obsolete systems of collective defence and security based on deterrence. The old solutions to the world's problems — the logic of balance and hegemony — are no longer enough to guarantee stability and security. These new threats add a new element to a list that includes regional conflicts in the Middle East, Asia and Africa; pandemics; problems of development and the gap between North and South; human rights abuses; mass migrations; and issues concerning energy and the environment. These are phenomena that it is also impossible to resolve without a collective assumption of responsibility.

If we wish to govern these phenomena we need to be equal to their dimensions. No country, however strong and powerful, can take on such complex challenges single-handedly. Global threats demand a global response. In the final analysis, this means collective partnership. To have chosen as the theme of the sixty-first session "Implementing a global partnership for development" was thus particularly appropriate. Without collective action by the countries in the northern and southern hemispheres, international organizations and institutions, the public and private sector and civil society, it will be impossible to achieve the goals we have set.

First and foremost we need to reinvigorate multilateralism, by which I mean above all restoring the central, fundamental role of the United Nations. The recent experience in Lebanon and the strengthening of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) is one example of how the United Nations can regain its crucial importance in the resolution of international controversies. Above all, it demonstrates — and this is the key point — that if the stakeholders are willing to confer upon the United Nations a strong, central role, the Organization is well able to fulfil it.

In Lebanon we are still at square one, and much remains to be done. To underestimate the risk of this mission would be a serious mistake. We must, however, be pleased with how the United Nations, its Member States and — allow me to add — the European Union have addressed a situation that only two months ago risked getting out of hand, but which today presents a series of opportunities for the Middle East as a whole. We should be pleased to have set up a mission that represents the entire international community, a tangible expression of the very global partnership that we are discussing today. For, while it is true that Europe provides the backbone of UNIFIL, it cannot carry out its mission effectively without the contributions of China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Russia, Turkey and the many other non-European countries participating.

The question we must ask at this point is this: what do we need to do in order to continue the work just begun in Lebanon? More generally, in view of the crises and emergencies that surround us, what does the United Nations need in order to fulfil the principles of the Charter? It needs two things: first, quick completion of the reforms, and, secondly, the strong and unconditional support of its Members.

On the issue of reform, last year, after an intense series of negotiations, a moment of summary allowed us to lay the groundwork for giving the United Nations a more incisive role, to the benefit of the international community. The Peacebuilding Commission is the first major result, because it highlights the indestructible bond between development, security and human rights. A priority commitment to human rights and their safeguarding should be the goal of any country that wishes to lend greater ethical authority to its foreign policy. The results achieved by the reform on this point, through the establishment of the new Human Rights Council, are still being examined. The other significant outcome is the affirmation of the principle of the responsibility to protect, so that the international community will no longer be indifferent to acts of genocide.

But it is on the General Assembly and the Security Council that we must focus our attention, by restoring the central role of the General Assembly as the main decision-making, representative and policy-making body of the United Nations; and by renewing efforts to reform the Security Council, in terms both of its working methods and its composition. In the current situation Member States thus need to send a strong political signal that will help us to begin a new chapter and open the way to an innovative approach.

In other words, we need to enter a period of negotiation which has thus far eluded us, a period in which, rather than seeking to impose positions and models, we can undertake a true comparison of positions for the purpose of achieving solutions that are not divisive but, rather, enable the widest possible consensus. But a word of caution: everything is negotiable except for the ownership of the Organization by the Member States, by all of us, an ownership that represents the true pillar on which United Nations multilateralism must rest.

Another way for the United Nations to regain the forcefulness and credibility it needs to fulfil its mission is by strengthening the role of its great regional stakeholders. I am thinking first of the European Union, because if Europe is stronger the United Nations will be stronger. The world and the United Nations do not need a Europe that hesitates. Rather, they need a Europe that is able to play its part in meeting the challenges that await us. Europe, in turn, must become more aware that only by contributing to the resolution of global tensions can it give greater security and prosperity to its citizens.

The conditions for performing this role are there. The numbers alone make the European Union a global actor — 25 countries with a total population of more than 450 million, representing one fourth of the world's gross domestic product and every month allocating €500 million to third countries. Yet these numbers do not correspond to a comparable ability for the European Union to make a difference outside its own borders.

In the work of the Assembly and its various committees, the European Union is becoming a key actor. At every debate and on every resolution its position represents a point of reference in shaping the attitudes of the other regional groups. Our goal should be to acquire a similar ability within the Security Council. It may be a slow process, which will have to take into account points of resistance and stubborn legacies, but it should be pursued with determination. Only if Europe wields a more incisive influence on the issues of peace and security can it be considered a true global actor. The Balkan tragedies in the early 1990s were the result of an absent Europe. But when it is present, and when it is united, Europe can make the difference. That is what we are seeing in the Lebanese crisis. During the sixty-first session of the General Assembly, and in the course of its biennium in the Security Council, Italy will make a special effort to increase the commitment and role of the European Union at the United Nations.

Our aim is to make the Organization more effective in the areas and on the issues in which, by history and vocation, it can provide the most added value. The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, in particular nuclear weapons, has to be seen today in the context, above all, of the negotiation under way with Iran. But it is our duty to look further ahead and to strive, all together, to consolidate the general non-proliferation system. That principle will inspire the action of Italy when it enters the Security Council.

With regard to the Iranian nuclear file, we are ready to make our contribution to a negotiated solution that promotes regional security and stability.

In the Middle East, as I mentioned earlier, we need to seize our opportunities and openings , aware that there will be no peace until the Palestinian question has been resolved, with an independent, sovereign, vital and contiguous Palestinian state next to the state of Israel, and both within secure and internationally recognized borders.

That grave regional crisis should not lead us to forget Africa — long suffering, prey to ongoing crises, and even poorer than it was two decades ago. The situation in Darfur is critical. We cannot stand by and watch, for the simple reason that time has run out. We need to act quickly and strive for a gradual assumption of responsibility by the United Nations, in compliance with the decisions of the Security Council. The situation in the Horn of Africa is also a source of concern. Here a strong commitment is required from the Security Council, where, starting on 1 January 2007, Italy will make its contribution also, on the basis of its experience in the region. When I speak of Africa,

I mean primarily the gap between the northern and southern hemispheres, the phenomenon at the root of almost all the ills afflicting our era. It is that gap, above all, that causes the massive migratory flows that we cannot ignore and that we must address with realism, responsibility, equanimity, and especially solidarity.

In the Mediterranean we are working with our partners to address immigration on the basis of those principles, and seeking to facilitate legal flows and to counter both the illegal flows and the parties that profit from them, seeking to facilitate the integration into our countries of those who have immigrated legally, filled with hope and the desire to work.

But there is another dangerous gap that risks leaving an even deeper gash in the world. I am referring to what until a few years ago was called a clash of civilizations and religions between the Christian and Islamic worlds. I refuse to believe that such a clash exists. Extremists and fanatics do exist, but civilizations and religions were made for the sake of dialogue, exchange and mutual enrichment. We can promote, and we want to promote, this relationship by building new policies to bring us closer to the countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean, with the goal of making that sea a basin of peace and harmonious coexistence among diverse civilizations and religions.

Let me return to the central issue of this session, the global partnership for development, in order to clarify one point. There is a risk that the reinvigoration of multilateralism, United Nations reform, and a collective commitment to the various theatres of crisis will produce no lasting effect unless development issues are treated as priorities. It is up to the United Nations as the driving force, the glue of solidarity among peoples, and the fullest expression of multilateralism, to keep development at the top of the international agenda. For it is in the connection between security, solidarity and development that the added value of the United Nations lies, in the full awareness that there can be no peace without development and no development without peace.

It is not enough to enunciate at this rostrum, as speakers have been doing for six years now, the words "Millennium Development Goals". We must get to work and carry them out, starting with the adoption of the financial, trade, technological and environmental steps required and aiming for a very specific, ambitious goal that responds above all to a moral duty: to guarantee a dignified life for every human being.

I wish to conclude with a few considerations on the fundamental principles and values that inspire our action when we deal with multilateralism, the search for peace, security and development, and north-south relations. All these issues coalesce in a defence of life and struggle against all forms of hatred, violence, discrimination and marginalization, undeniable values that, together with democratic principles, are the foundations of coexistence among peoples and should inspire the action of the world's nations. Today, sadly, these values are still denied and trampled upon, as if we had learned nothing from the horrors of the past. We cannot sit by watching indifferently in the face of barbarous acts. We are for peace and solidarity. We are against the death penalty, injustice and human suffering. That is something we must always remember, especially on the eve of major decisions. That is what is expected of us from those who sacrificed their lives for peace, for a righteous cause, for an ideal, to defend freedom, the same freedom that we enjoy every day in a democracy.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Italy for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Romano Prodi, Prime Minister of the Republic of Italy, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Milo Djukanović, President of the Government of the Republic of Montenegro

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by the President of the Government of the Republic of Montenegro.

Mr. Milo Djukanović, President of the Government of the Republic of Montenegro, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Milo Djukanović, President of the Government of the Republic of Montenegro, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Djukanović (Montenegro) (*spoke in Montenegran; English text provided by the delegation*): Allow me first to welcome your election, Madam, to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-

first session, confident that it will result in important decisions in the common interest.

It is with particular pride and emotion that I wish to recall the sixtieth session, during which many decisions, important for the Organization, were made. In Montenegro it will be remembered as historic since it was at that session that our nation was admitted as a fully fledged Member of this unique world organization. I wish therefore to thank the Secretary-General and the President of the sixtieth session, Mr. Eliasson, and the other representatives of nations in this forum for having contributed to making the ceremony of Montenegro's admission as the 192nd Member State of the United Nations so uplifting.

It is a great honour and pleasure at this session to represent Montenegro which for the first time now participates in the debate as a fully-fledged Member. As the President of Montenegro, Filip Vujanović, has already stressed from this rostrum, we see this as a huge chance, as well as a huge responsibility. Montenegro is a young European nation that has existed on its own on the international scene for only a few months, but it is firmly determined to continue with even more strength to contribute to peace, stability and prosperity, by respecting and promoting the underlying ideas, principles and goals of the United Nations and its documents. I am strongly convinced that in the time in which we live the importance of a State, big or small, primarily depends on its contribution to the respect for and implementation of these fundamental international values and standards. This is relevant in both a regional and a broader context.

It is in the nature of small States to be more sensitive to the need for tolerance and dialogue, for openness, and international relations based on mutual trust, equality and solidarity, and also to the value of unity in diversity, which is the axiom of this time, and of global integration, the basis on which today's Montenegro is developing. In this sense I would add that small nations are destined to be elitist. I hope that it is not presumptuous to say that Montenegro promoted these principles best in the recent referendum that we organized in full partnership with the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the Council of Europe, proving that even in south-eastern Europe the most difficult and most sensitive issues — such as the status issue — can be tackled in a democratic fashion and in accordance with the highest international standards. We are therefore proud to stress that the democratic process and outcome of the Montenegrin referendum is also a European policy victory in our region, and are confident that through this example we can contribute to stability and good-neighbourly relations in our region.

Indeed, regional cooperation is inseparable from European and global integration, which are essentially about issues of peace, stability, security and prosperity, the more so as the globalization that is gaining momentum confronts us with new challenges and new threats of a political, environmental and socio-economic nature. The issues of today, such as international terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, illegal migration and trafficking, poverty, threats to the environment, and so forth, highlight the need for common action.

This vision of the future is exemplified in the Millennium Declaration, which projects the principles and goals of the Charter to the world in a new age, highlighting common responsibility and solidarity in order to accomplish a vision of a more secure, prosperous and just world. Without stability there is no democracy, just as without democracy there is no stability or sustainable economic development. These are interdependent processes that must take place simultaneously, and that highlights the importance of accomplishing the Millennium Goals. All this brings to the fore the importance of efficient multilateralism through action by the United Nations, which needs to be reformed in order to adequately cope with today's challenges, as well as other international and regional organizations and all nations.

With full awareness and responsibility we will continue to build in Montenegro stable institutions that guarantee the rule of law, freedoms, equality and non-discrimination, human and minority rights as well as solidarity and a market economy. We will also continue to promote multi-ethnic harmony and tolerance, convinced that religious and cultural diversity is enriching and conducive to greater stability and growth. It is also conducive to striking a balance between the State and the individual, fully in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

In this context I wish to express my gratitude to the specialized United Nations agencies for their

efforts and support. I believe it is important to stress from this rostrum that in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme and our European partners we will build the first eco-building designed to house United Nations agencies operating in Montenegro.

We are very proud that at the very outset of life on its own Montenegro was admitted to the United Nations, the institution that is the meeting point for a multitude of cultures and identities, which it merges into one address that each and every one of us identifies with, an institution in which all peoples and States enjoy full equality. We see this as historic proof of acknowledgement of respect for the fundamental values and goals of the United Nations, still equally valid today. I am confident that Montenegro will distinguish itself even more as a trustworthy and constructive partner and that our cooperation within the United Nations will take on a new quality and will remain a key component of the political action of Montenegro. Today's Montenegro has a clear vision of development and of its European perspective, and is ready to fully contribute to a united Europe and the United Nations.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Government of the Republic of Montenegro for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Milo Djukanović, President of the Government of the Republic of Montenegro, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Sir Michael Somare, Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea

The President: The Assembly will now hear a statement by the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea.

Sir Michael T. Somare, Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency, Sir Michael Somare, Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Sir Michael T. Somare (Papua New Guinea): I wish to convey Papua New Guinea's congratulations to you, Madam President, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. I assure you of my country's full cooperation during your presidency. We compliment your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his stewardship of our work during his tenure. We also congratulate him on his appointment as Sweden's Foreign Minister and wish him well.

On 10 October 1975, 24 days after Papua New Guinea attained political independence, I stood at this very rostrum and addressed the Assembly with a lot of hope and expectations. Like many developing countries coming out from the colonial yoke, Papua New Guinea committed itself to the principles and purposes of the United Nations. I said: "I state our fundamental commitment to the maintenance of peace throughout our world and our undertaking to uphold the principles of the Charter of the United Nations Organization."

We believed that the United Nations was the most appropriate body to achieve our aspirations of meaningful economic development, respect for our sovereignty and the attainment of a peaceful and secure world. The harsh reality today is that these aspirations remain largely unfulfilled for many of us. Our record will indicate lost opportunities to realize the promise of a better world.

Our world today is marked by an inequitable global trading order and a hostile security environment. Wanton globalization and unfettered trade liberalization are affecting many of us in ways that are detrimental to the livelihood of our people. Unilateral actions by the big and powerful to resolve disputes are no longer incidental, but are the order of the day. We note the increasing incidence of human atrocities, genocides, wars, poverty, terrorism, the emergence of HIV/AIDS, and an increase in malaria and tuberculosis. Our streets and communities are littered with small arms and light weapons. The smuggling of drugs and humans and other illegal activities are on the rise. Environmental degradation and climate change continue unabated. We must confront these issues urgently. To complement efforts in other forums, Papua New Guinea, with other countries of the Pacific region, has agreed to pool its limited resources under the Pacific plan to address these issues.

Papua New Guinea continues to believe that the United Nations offers the best hope for its Member States to address these ongoing concerns and other emerging challenges facing humanity today. In this regard, my country supports the ongoing United Nations reform initiatives that seek to make its

operations more effective and responsive. We must ensure that its collective security mandates and functions, and its various organizations, are strengthened and not weakened. We are pleased to note the establishment of the Human Rights Council and Peacebuilding Commission. Papua New Guinea believes in a revitalized General Assembly whose role and authority reflect its broad membership. We must press on with the reform of the Security Council with courage and boldness so that it reflects the political and economic realities of today. An expanded Security Council must be more democratic and transparent. Its membership must include developing countries, while maintaining geographic balance and representation.

Global trade today is characterized more by the unfair practices of those already holding decided advantages than by the opportunities it offers to developing countries such as Papua New Guinea. Our efforts to develop a more equitable trading order are hampered by the reluctance of our developed partners to open their economies and engage in genuine development discussions. Adding insult to injury, many of our developed partners have yet to meet the targets they agreed with respect to Official Development Assistance.

While we appreciate the efforts of some of our developed partners to ease the burden of debt under the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative, we are disappointed that many of them have not shown the same leadership on the Doha Development Round, leading to its collapse. We are calling for developing countries to join us in framing a new and true development round. We must exercise leadership rather than passively allowing others to chart our future.

Despite these difficulties, Papua New Guinea is pursuing economic development programmes that are based on an export-driven economic growth strategy. At the heart of this policy objective is the focus on rural development. We have developed a five-year medium-term development strategy and aligned it with the Millennium Development Goals. Achieving those goals by 2015 is a tremendous challenge for Papua New Guinea but we have taken the first step in providing budget funding for its implementation. We call for the support of the United Nations system and other genuine development partners to meet these vital commitments.

As a result of better policy coordination, stricter implementation of structural reform and prudent financial and economic management, Papua New Guinea has attained macroeconomic and fiscal stability. Our economy is growing, interest rates have fallen, and the exchange rate has been stabilized. Our foreign exchange reserves are at an all-time high. We are using these gains to reinvest in productive sectors of our economy and in delivering services to our people. Development partners must play a supportive role to sustain these gains. This can be done through fair trade opportunities, equitable markets, increased foreign investment, transfer of technology, capacity-building and providing quality overseas development assistance.

I now turn to an issue about which my country feels strongly, that of climate change and sea-level rise. For us this is not academic, it is reality. Small islands and low-lying atolls in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific region are being submerged by rising sea levels. As I speak, my own people are being resettled to higher ground. Papua New Guinea's strong position on the environment is drawn from the preamble to our national Constitution, which states:

> "We declare our fourth goal to be for Papua New Guinea's natural resources and environment to be conserved and used for the collective benefit of us all, and be replenished for the benefit of future generations."

That constitutional imperative underpins my country's whole approach to sustainable development objectives, including those contained in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the Mauritius Strategy.

Environmental degradation is occurring at a frightening pace. Scientific studies suggest that climate change is causing increasing incidences of environmental catastrophes such as hurricanes, tsunamis, landslides and flash floods. Our planet is in distress. As co-inhabitants of this world we must all equally share responsibility to address the root causes of this problem. We urge industrialized countries to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. We call upon those that have not yet done so to accede to and ratify the Kyoto Protocol.

Papua New Guinea is prepared to play its part to protect and conserve the world's tropical rainforest with the aim of stabilizing the earth's climate. The findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate

Change suggest that an estimated 20 per cent to 25 per cent of annual global emissions were generated through land-use change, primarily from the degradation of forest resources. In this context it is crucial for us to protect the tropical rainforests through sustainable and fair market-based incentives.

The dilemma is that for some of us the forestry sector is a major revenue earner, a provider of much-needed employment, a facilitator of important infrastructure projects, and a catalyst for the provision of basic services in rural areas. The present incentives offered by international markets for agriculture, forestry and emissions reductions are inadequate. These are perverse incentives from the standpoint of the environment. Papua New Guinea, along with Costa Rica, has formed a new Coalition for Rainforest Nations that includes many other countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Pacific. Together we are pursuing an initiative to access global carbon markets and to support efforts to reduce rates of deforestation. Simply put, this approach seeks to recognize the contribution of resource owners to conserving and protecting rainforests for the benefit of mankind. We invite more nations to join our efforts to create new markets and reform outmoded market and regulatory mechanisms. That is necessary if we are to contribute more effectively towards environmental sustainability, economic development, climate stability and poverty reduction.

The initiative on deforestation is part of a broader agenda being pursued by my Government to implement the Millennium Development Goal to ensure environmental sustainability. We are convinced that by implementing the seventh goal we will harness our ability to achieve environmentally and socially sustainable economic growth. Many times developing countries are drawn into false promises of international investment. Often we find our natural resources exploited, leaving us with neither the resource nor the money. We will not allow this to continue. We want wealth from our natural resources to remain within our nations to fuel our economic growth.

The threat of HIV/AIDS is real in many of our countries and has serious implications for social and economic development. In Papua New Guinea my Government has passed HIV/AIDS legislation, underpinned by a comprehensive HIV/AIDS policy framework. To ensure close scrutiny I have vested my department with the responsibility of overseeing implementation. In addition, I have appointed a special minister to assist me in providing political leadership on this particular issue. But our experience suggests that national action alone is not enough. It requires a concerted global response. This is a war that must be waged on all fronts and by all countries. We thank the United Nations and its related agencies for their efforts to address this issue. We also applaud the bold leadership of former United States President Mr. Bill Clinton and of Mr. Bill Gates in this regard.

Of equal importance are the battles against malaria, tuberculosis and other preventable diseases. While we, as a global community, have focused on HIV/AIDS and bird flu, this has diluted our attention to malaria, which remains the biggest killer disease in my country. I call upon our development partners to support Papua New Guinea and other countries in maintaining perspective on these challenges.

Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations is a serious threat to international peace and security. It must be condemned irrespective of who perpetrates it. All countries and peoples of the world have a serious responsibility to stand united and fight this evil. However, Papua New Guinea is concerned about the erosion of the international community's moral authority to address this issue. It is unhelpful to our credibility if certain of our members choose to address this issue in flagrant violation of international norms and universally agreed conventions. As with other cross-border challenges, Member States will require the support of the United Nations and development partners with capacity-building and other necessary resources to effectively fight global terrorism.

The conflict in the Middle East, despite various United Nations resolutions, remains unresolved. Papua New Guinea appeals to all parties to the conflict, including those Powers with the capacity to influence a positive outcome, to make the hard concessions necessary for a peaceful resolution of this long-standing issue. The recent confrontation in Lebanon resulted in the loss of innocent lives and massive destruction to infrastructure. Papua New Guinea appeals for restraint by all parties and urges that full use be made of the dispute settlement procedures of the United Nations. Comprehensive and lasting solutions must be found to the issues that led to the conflict. Neighbouring countries and the international community as a whole can make positive contributions by shepherding a process that allows for genuine

dialogue to take place. We commend the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and European countries such as France, Italy and Germany and others that are contributing troops to maintain the ceasefire.

Papua New Guinea is extremely concerned about the proliferation among States of nuclear, chemical, biological and other weapons of mass destruction. We continue to maintain that there is no real justification for the retention and further development of these instruments of war. We call upon all countries to ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and other related treaties to reduce the threat to international peace and security by weapons of mass destruction. Sadly, we were reminded by the Secretary-General yesterday of the apathy that surrounds actions on non-proliferation and disarmament.

The work of the United Nations Special Committee on Decolonization remains unfinished. We still have 16 non-self-governing territories, some in the Pacific, that are yet to exercise their right to self-determination. The referendum in Tokelau demonstrated a true spirit of cooperation between Tokelau and New Zealand. We congratulate both Governments and assure the people of Tokelau of our respect for their decision to remain in free association with New Zealand.

I conclude by saying that the world has changed in ways that not only provide opportunities, but also offer more complex challenges for Members of the United Nations. The emergence of a trend over the years to try to resolve these challenges outside the principles and framework prescribed by the United Nations has resulted in a world worse than the founders of the Organization envisaged. We must renew our commitment and faith in the United Nations and seek to reform it in ways that reflect the realities of today.

At this juncture I take the opportunity to pay a special tribute to the outgoing Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, for his outstanding contribution to the United Nations and the world. We wish him well. As this is likely to be the last General Assembly session in which I take part, I take this opportunity to thank all those who have contributed in one way or another in support of Papua New Guinea since independence. When I brought my nation to take its seat in this Assembly 31 years ago I said, and I reaffirm today, that within the limits of our resources Papua New Guinea will play an active and positive role in the United Nations.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea for the statement he has just made.

Sir Michael T. Somare, Prime Minister of Papua New Guinea, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Esteban Lazo Hernández, Vice-President of the Republic of Cuba

The President: The Assembly will now hear an address by the Vice-President of the Republic of Cuba.

Mr. Esteban Lazo Hernández, Vice-President of the Republic of Cuba, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I have great pleasure in welcoming to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Esteban Lazo Hernández, Vice-President of the Republic of Cuba, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. Lazo Hernández (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): As President Hugo Chávez said in his brilliant statement, only four days ago the Fourteenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in Cuba, concluded. Today I speak on behalf of the Movement's Chairman, President Fidel Castro, fulfilling our obligation to inform the Assembly of the main decisions agreed at the summit conference in Havana.

As First Vice-President of the Council of State and Minister of the Republic of Cuba, Raúl Castro, said in his opening speech:

> "The current international situation, characterized by the one super-Power's irrational attempts to control the world, aided by its allies, shows that we need to be increasingly united in defence of the principles and purposes upon which the Non-Aligned Movement was established, which are those enshrined in international law and the Charter of the United Nations."

While the founding of the Movement was necessary more than four decades ago, its continued relevance in today's world is beyond doubt. The summit held in Cuba was an indisputable success, in spite of the threats and pressures of those who oppose the unity and common efforts of the countries of the south. The summit saw high levels of participation, in

terms both of the number of countries attending the conference and of the attendance of heads of State or Government. Profound and fruitful debates were held in an atmosphere of true understanding, unity and cohesion, which allowed for the adoption of documents of crucial importance to the role of the Non-Aligned Movement.

As the new Chairman, Cuba was given clear mandates and an action programme that will govern its activities as head of the Movement. As a result of the summit, the Non-Aligned Movement has been strengthened and consequently so has the political unity of the countries of the South. The diverse and heterogeneous nature of the Movement's membership, far from weakening it, constitutes its essential strength. These features have allowed for the creation of solid consensus that will be a positive contribution to our efforts to overcome the many and serious challenges humanity faces today. The commendable work of Malaysia as the Movement's Chairman over the past three years was acknowledged at the Summit. There was no cause or demand by a country of the south which was not duly considered or which did not meet with the support of the Movement.

Progress in the defence of multilateralism, demanding respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States, and ensuring the full realization of our peoples' right to development and peace were ratified at the Summit as the Movement's principles, whose implementation was urgently needed. The Heads of State or Government decided to work to suppress acts of aggression or other actions contrary to the preservation of peace and to encourage the peaceful settlement of international disputes.

The summit called on all nations to abstain from the use of force or from threatening to use force against the territorial integrity or independence of any State. Participating nations promoted the development of relations of friendship based on respect for the principle of equal rights and the will of all peoples to struggle against foreign occupation. They urged nations to extend international cooperation with a view to overcoming the serious economic, social, cultural and humanitarian challenges that face the world and to promoting respect for the human rights and fundamental liberties of all for the benefit of all. The fundamental and inalienable right of all peoples to self-determination was reaffirmed in Havana. The non-aligned countries agreed that world peace and security are today more imperilled than ever as a result, among other factors, of the growing trend of the most powerful States to resort to unilateral measures and to the threat of pre-emptive wars.

The Movement's commitment to general and complete disarmament, and nuclear disarmament in particular, under strict and efficient international monitoring, was underscored. The summit also reaffirmed the basic and inalienable right of all States to research, develop, produce and use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes and to be free from any kind of discrimination in this connection, in conformity with their respective international obligations. Similarly, the summit clearly and firmly pronounced itself to be against terrorism, double standards in international relations, coercive unilateral measures against any nation, regime-change policies, and the failure of developed countries to fulfil their commitments in economic and social areas.

The heads of State or Government reaffirmed their hope to live in a peaceful world in which all nations have the right to a better future and a fair and equitable world order based on the sustainable development of all nations. They affirmed that in its current form globalization perpetuates and even exacerbates the marginalization of the countries of the south and demanded that it be radically transformed into a positive force for change for the benefit of all peoples.

The participants reaffirmed the right of the Palestinian people to have their own State, and condemned the Government of Israel for the new wave of crimes and massacres in Gaza and other occupied territories. They also vigorously condemned Israel's merciless acts of aggression against Lebanon and the serious violations of that nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The people and Government of Bolivia, facing attempts to destabilize the country instigated by external forces, received a gesture of support and solidarity from the summit. The process under way in that sister nation, aimed at guaranteeing the real rights of all Bolivians and at securing full national control over the country's natural resources, was offered solid support.

The Movement considered with great concern the aggressive policies and intensification of action aimed at undermining the stability of the Bolivarian Republic

of Venezuela and expressed support for the inalienable right of the Venezuelan people to determine its form of government and choose its economic, political and social system, free from foreign intervention, subversion, coercion or restrictions of any kind. The non-aligned undertook to promote and participate in a true process of democratization and reform of the United Nations so as to leave behind the anti-democratic impositions and practices of the Security Council and to give the General Assembly its due decisive role, in conformity with the roles and powers described in the United Nations Charter.

I have mentioned only a few examples of the positions adopted at the summit held in Havana with respect to the most diverse issues on the international agenda. The documents adopted will be officially distributed to all United Nations Member States. A number of the decisions adopted at the summit will soon be put into practice at this session of the General Assembly.

Cuba is aware of the immense responsibility inherent in presiding over the Non-Aligned Movement at one of the most difficult times in human history, when we face more inequality and injustice than ever before. We shall not rest in our efforts to have the Movement occupy the place it can and must occupy in the international arena, in keeping with not only its broad membership of 118 countries — nearly two thirds of the membership of the United Nations — but also its history of acting on behalf of the loftiest causes.

Inaugurating the Sixth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Havana 27 years ago, President Fidel Castro said:

> "The struggle for peace and for a just economic order and a workable solution to the pressing problems that weigh on our peoples is, in our opinion, increasingly becoming the main question posed to the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries. Peace and the immense risks that threaten it, is not something that should be left exclusively in the hands of the big military Powers. Peace is possible, but world peace can only be assured to the extent that all countries are consciously determined to fight for it — peace, not just for a part of the world, but for all peoples."

A few days later in this same Hall, reporting on that summit, President Castro said:

> "The sounds of weapons, of threatening language, and of arrogant behaviour in the international arena must cease. We have had enough of the illusion that the problems of the world can be solved by nuclear weapons. Bombs may kill the hungry, the sick, and the ignorant, but they cannot kill hunger, disease or ignorance. Nor can they kill the righteous rebellion of the peoples."

The countries of the South will work united for justice, peace and the development of our nations and the entire world, convinced that a better world is possible if we all struggle for it.

I should now like to say a few words on behalf of the people and Government of Cuba. Our people's exercise of its right to self-determination faces new threats. The Bush Administration has stepped up its brutally hostile measures against Cuba with new economic sanctions that further intensify what is already the longest blockade human history has known. More severe reprisals are also being taken against those from other nations who have business dealings with Cuba, and financial transactions with our country are viciously persecuted. The very Government of the United States recognizes that it is spending more today in persecuting and punishing those who have business dealings with Cuba than in monitoring the finances of those who attacked the twin towers.

This past June the Bush Administration approved the second version of its most recent plan of aggression and domination against our country, aimed not only at overthrowing the revolution but also at destroying the Cuban nation. In violation of international norms and laws, an unprecedented build-up of financial and material support for subversive actions aimed at overthrowing the constitutional order freely chosen by the Cuban people is being promoted. That anti-Cuban plan contains a chapter that is being kept secret.

The precedents for these decisions are the covert actions undertaken against the Cuban revolution, which include mercenary invasions, terrorist actions, the introduction of plagues and epidemics to the country, and more than 600 plots to assassinate Fidel. Thousands of Cubans have lost their lives or been maimed for life as a result of this criminal policy. As the height of hypocrisy and irresponsibility, the Government of the United States tolerates the presence of, and protects, the terrorists who plan new actions against our people on United States soil. While manoeuvring to free the murderers responsible for monstrous crimes — such as the notorious

international terrorist and CIA agent Luis Posada Carriles, whom they refuse to extradite to Venezuela — the United States Government is illegally and unjustly keeping five courageous anti-terrorist Cuban activists in prison.

In spite of all these acts of aggression and the criminal blockade, the Cuban people will never be defeated. Cuba's internationalist efforts continue unhindered. More than 30,000 Cuban doctors and other Cuban health professionals are saving lives in 68 different countries today. We are participating in the struggle against illiteracy on several continents. We are developing a plan to train 100,000 doctors for the third world, and we are helping hundreds of thousands of people in many countries to regain their sight through Operation Miracle. With these efforts we are just fulfilling our fundamental duty in solidarity to aid all the peoples of the world.

Cuba is making progress and will continue to advance and face the future with optimism and unity. Its educated and hard-working people, who consider humanity to be their homeland, will struggle hand in hand with the peoples the Assembly represents for the right to live in peace, justice and dignity for all.

The President: On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Vice-President of the Republic of Cuba for the statement he has just made.

Mr. Esteban Lazo Hernández, Vice-President of the Republic of Cuba, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Highness Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani, Heir Apparent of the State of Qatar, to address the Assembly.

Sheikh Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me pleasure at the outset to congratulate you, Madam President, on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. I wish you every success in your endeavours. I should also like to thank your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for his efforts during the Assembly's sixtieth session. Our thanks also go to Mr. Kofi Annan, who has been working to strengthen the role of the United Nations.

During the September 2005 Summit, the international community reaffirmed its commitment to the global partnership for development in order to achieve internationally agreed development objectives. The United Nations system remains one of the most important pillars of international support for that partnership. I wish to recall here that the State of Qatar has always been a supportive partner in development efforts, particularly in combating poverty, because all that has positive results for stability and international peace and security.

In 2001 Qatar hosted the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization, which culminated in the Doha Ministerial Declaration. It also hosted the South Summit in 2005, in which His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, launched his initiative to establish the South's Fund for Development and Humanitarian Assistance. Moreover, His Highness reaffirmed Qatar's commitment to meet the internationally agreed official development assistance target relative to its gross national product. His Highness also offered to host the first Review Conference of the International Conference on Financing for Development. I am pleased to note that the State of Qatar will be hosting the Sixth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies, scheduled for 30 October to 1 November this year.

I should also like to recall here that Qatar has extended emergency and disaster relief assistance and made many contributions to the various United Nations funds and programmes.

We must work to strengthen the role of the United Nations and revitalize and support its institutions so that they can carry out the tasks entrusted to them in different parts of the world. However, if the Organization is to discharge its role in full, its Charter must be adhered to and respected. Furthermore, an agreement must be reached on a new formula to reform the Security Council and update its working methods. The General Assembly must be allowed to play its role in the maintenance of international peace and security alongside the Security Council.

We were shocked and astonished at the disproportionate Israeli response against fraternal Lebanon, which killed hundreds of innocent civilians, totally decimated its infrastructure and left scores of Lebanese towns and villages in ruins. It has also displaced one quarter of Lebanon's population, which is indeed a full-scale war crime.

The Arab-Israeli conflict and the Palestinian question must be accorded top priority, for which a comprehensive, permanent and just solution is urgently needed. The Palestinian question is an example of suffering visited upon a people whose legitimate rights were denied, a question that has been on the agendas of

the Security Council and the General Assembly for more than 50 years. Therefore the international community must review its position towards a fundamental issue that it has left unresolved for more than half a century, thus compounding the tragedy of the Palestinian people.

Compelling Israel to implement United Nations resolutions is a collective duty that we must all fulfil so that international legitimacy will not be branded as selective. The Palestinian people must be enabled to exercise their right to self-determination and to establish their independent State with Jerusalem as its capital.

A comprehensive, peaceful settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict should also be achieved, on the basis of Israel's withdrawal from all the territories it occupied in 1967, including the Syrian Golan and the Lebanese Sheba'a farms. We also stress that the guarantee of permanent peace, security and stability in the region lies in making the Middle East a zone free from all weapons of mass destruction without any exceptions.

The difficult situation in fraternal Iraq requires our cooperation in order to help it overcome this untenable situation and its repercussions. We have continuously reaffirmed our commitment to the unity and sovereignty of Iraq, to the rights of Iraqis to live in dignity and freedom and to rebuild their country, and for Iraq to regain its well-deserved place in the region and among the family of nations.

We want to pay tribute to the Government of the Sudan, which after tireless efforts has succeeded in establishing peace in the south of the country. It continues its sincere efforts to achieve security and stability in different parts of the country. We fully support those efforts and look forward to more support from the international community to fraternal Sudan in order to preserve its unity and territorial integrity.

We also support ongoing efforts by the League of Arab States to achieve national reconciliation in fraternal Somalia and to restore the rule of law in that country. We call upon the international community to support those efforts so that stability and security can be restored to Somalia.

We reaffirm the important role of the United Nations and the need to enhance it so that it can put international relations on a solid foundation of understanding and common interests. We also stress the importance of resolving conflicts and disputes by peaceful means and of cooperation among all nations to end violence and combat terrorism. We must avoid squandering our resources and wasting our energies on wars and conflicts. Instead, we should channel them towards development and progress. We look forward to a new world governed by the principles of justice, equality, freedom, democracy and peaceful coexistence among its peoples, nations and civilizations.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I now call on His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the United Arab Emirates.

Sheikh Al Nahyan (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): It gives me pleasure, on behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates, to extend to you, Madam President, and to your fraternal country, the Kingdom of Bahrain, our heartfelt congratulations on your election to the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-first session. We are confident that your wide experience will enable you to deal wisely and competently with the issues on our agenda, and we wish you every success. We also take this opportunity to commend your predecessor, Mr. Jan Eliasson, for the skilful manner in which he managed the work of the sixtieth session, and to thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his outstanding efforts, which have significantly contributed to strengthening the role of this international organization in addressing the challenges the world has faced during his term of office.

In spite of all the expectations that we hoped would be fulfilled in the areas of establishing peace and collective security, development, strengthening human rights and the rule of law, and reform of the United Nations, we meet today amid extremely serious security, political and economic conditions that have resulted in increasing poverty and epidemics and have prevented the sustainable development mechanisms from achieving the desired development goals of the 2005 Summit. Instead of intensifying our efforts to strengthen international relations and enhance positive investment in economic globalization, we had to direct our efforts towards finding temporary solutions for the grave security threats facing our world today in many regions.

The major weakness demonstrated by the performance of some bodies of this international organization, especially in those entrusted with maintaining international peace and security, requires a reconsideration of the ways to reform its main

structures and working methods, particularly for the Security Council. Most recent events have proved its inability to take the immediate and effective measures needed to stop acts of aggression and to end occupation.

Therefore, as we study the proposals by the Secretary-General for developing the work of the Organization, we must ensure that reform is based on the principles of equality among States in rights and duties in order to ensure that developing and small countries are increasingly and effectively represented in the Security Council in accordance with the principle of equitable geographical distribution. It is also necessary to strengthen the working methods of the Security Council to ensure that it does not infringe upon the competencies of the Secretariat, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, so that the performance and effectiveness of those bodies can be strengthened and increased.

The United Arab Emirates — which collaborates with the sisterly countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the League of Arab States and other groups in supporting all possible diplomatic and mediation efforts aimed at containing the hotbeds of tension and conflicts in the Middle East region, including the Arabian Gulf — reiterates the importance of resolving differences through peaceful means and of strengthening confidence-building measures based on the principle of respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States and non-interference in their internal affairs. All this falls under our common responsibility to maintain the requirements of regional and international peace, security and stability.

Therefore, we ask the Islamic Republic of Iran to demonstrate its goodwill towards finding a just and lasting settlement for its occupation of the three United Arab Emirates islands, Greater and Lesser Tunb and Abu Musa, by responding to our country's repeated initiatives, which were endorsed by the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council, the Council of the League of Arab States and the international community. Those initiatives call for initiating direct and serious negotiations on this issue or referring it to the International Court of Justice for legal arbitration.

We support the right of countries to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). We optimistically look forward to continuing the Iranian-European talks on Iran's nuclear question in order to reach a lasting and peaceful settlement and to ensure that the safety and security of the peoples and countries of the region are not exposed to any threat, danger or unnecessary new confrontations.

We also stress that the international community must deal with this question with utmost transparency so as to ensure the implementation of all relevant resolutions of the United Nations, in particular those calling for the establishment of a zone free from weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, in the Middle East and the Arabian Gulf. That makes it incumbent upon Israel to accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to subject all of its nuclear facilities to the IAEA safeguards regime.

The United Arab Emirates supports the political process in Iraq and efforts for its reconstruction, and hopes that the efforts of the Iraqi Government will lead to achieving national unity, consolidating security and stability in Iraq, and implementing the recommendations of the Abu Dhabi Declaration and the New York conference on the International Compact for the Reconstruction of Iraq.

We also reaffirm our full support for all regional and international measures to combat terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, as it constitutes a grave threat to the security and sovereignty of States and causes unjustified depletion of civilian lives and properties. We also support international efforts aimed at convening an international conference to define this phenomenon, address its causes and set the standards for differentiating between terrorism and the right of people to self-determination.

As we all strive to create a suitable environment for promoting dialogue among civilizations and strengthening religious tolerance, we heard with regret and surprise the recent statements by Pope Benedict XVI, which gave an opportunity to the extremists to deepen the gap of intolerance and to raise doubts about the intentions of others. That makes it incumbent on us to avoid repeating such statements in future in order to promote further understanding between religions and civilizations.

We are deeply concerned at the continued inability of the international community to solve the Palestinian question and establish peace in the Middle East. That has encouraged Israel to continue its occupation of the Palestinian territories, the Sheba'a farms in Lebanon and the Syrian Golan, and to repeat its aggressions on various levels. Therefore, we urge the United Nations to respond today to the recent

initiative of the League of Arab States, which calls upon the international organization to play an effective role in reviving the peace process in the Middle East and resume direct negotiations on all tracks, in accordance with resolutions of international legitimacy and the Arab Peace Initiative.

We also affirm that consolidation of peace and stability in the Middle East region cannot be achieved through military power or the continued and deliberate destruction of the infrastructure in the Palestinian territories and in Lebanon, but through compelling Israel to ensure its full compliance with international resolutions, including the resumption of negotiations with the Palestinian Authority and the release of Palestinian funds and the thousands of Palestinian detainees and prisoners. Israel is further requested to open the crossing points to secure delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people, to remove settlements and the separation wall and to withdraw fully from all the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, so that the establishment of an independent Palestinian State, with Al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital, can be declared.

We welcome the considerable efforts by the Lebanese Government to extend its control throughout its national territories, with the support of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon. In this regard we demand that the international community intensify its pressures on Israel to compel it to fulfil its legal obligations, as provided in Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), including its full respect for Lebanon's sovereignty and territorial integrity, handing over maps of landmines and entering into negotiations on the exchange of prisoners. We also affirm the importance of doubling the international assistance directed to the reconstruction of Lebanon.

As for the Sudan — and following up the circumstances relating to Security Council resolution 1706 (2006) — we had hoped that the Sudan would have been given sufficient time to resolve the Darfur question internally. We declare our support for the efforts of the Sudanese Government to find a lasting solution to this question. We hope that the United Nations and the African Union will continue their positive role in this regard, in conformity with the Arab League's efforts, in order to maintain the sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence of the Sudan.

We also call for strengthening of the efforts and endeavours to reconcile political differences and disputes in regions such as Somalia, Afghanistan, other African countries and troubled regions of the world in order to contain tensions and conflicts in those regions and assist their peoples to realize their aspirations towards permanent peace, stability and prosperity.

The United Arab Emirates, which incorporated the Millennium Development Goals in its national development policy and has come a long way in the process of achieving economic and human development, has extended generous assistance to many poor and affected countries. In this regard, the United Arab Emirates would like to stress that with the ongoing problems of poverty, infectious diseases and unemployment, in addition to other economic, social and environmental problems, the international community must develop a firm and effective international mechanism that ensures a continuous flow of assistance to developing countries so as to enable them to improve their living conditions and build their national economies.

It is incumbent upon the advanced States, especially the Group of Eight, to fulfil their commitments as agreed at international conferences, especially in easing the onerous commercial conditions imposed on developing countries' trade, on their efforts to attract foreign capital and investment and on their use of advanced technology for peaceful purposes, in order to avoid marginalizing those countries and to ensure better participation for them in international trade.

Finally, we hope that our deliberations on the agenda items during this session will have a positive outcome that will contribute to addressing the critical issues we face today, and that they will enhance our common efforts to create a world based on the principles of the rule of law, justice, tolerance and peace.

The meeting rose at 1.30 p.m.